

MPR News | Minnesota Now Funding uncertain for electric vehicle charging stations on Minnesota highways
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NINA MOINI: There's a special kind of dread that comes from driving a car that's about to run out of gas or power. That may be why electric vehicle advocates say highways need to have more EV charging stations for people who make that switch to electric. Those advocates did have a recent win. A federal judge ordered the Trump administration to unfreeze funding for EV infrastructure, but Minnesota's funding is still in limbo. Joining me to explain is Moaz Uddin Mian, Senior EV Policy Specialist with the Great Plains Institute. Thank you so much for your time this afternoon, Moaz.

MOAZ UDDIN Hi, Nina. Thank you for having me.

MIAN:

NINA MOINI: Absolutely. Moaz, I wondered if you would explain, just to set the groundwork for folks, what happened in this lawsuit that Minnesota was a part of and why Minnesota's funding wasn't restored?

MOAZ UDDIN Yeah, yeah. Thanks for having me, Nina. So this preliminary injunction, which came out last week and restored about \$1 billion in NEVI funding for 14 states, did not include particularly Minnesota, Vermont, and DC because they said that these states did not sufficiently explain how the freeze harmed them to qualify for interim relief. But that could change.

NINA MOINI: OK. So when you say that could change, what are the options for Minnesota?

MOAZ UDDIN There are quite a few scenarios that we are looking at, and we're following this case pretty closely as it comes with everything EV charging in the country, in the state. So Minnesota could provide additional evidence to the court and qualify for this interim relief. And then, of course, looking on the bright side, the ruling finds that states are likely to prevail on most of their legal claims. So if the states win the case, then that should unfreeze NEVI funding for all states, including Minnesota.

NINA MOINI: Yeah, so it's not necessarily the end of the story. But let's talk about some of the specifics. I guess MnDOT says that 44 million was the amount that's been frozen that they were going to use to create 12 stations this year and 12 next year. The money could have paid for an estimated 60 charging stations and also a study to study where to put them where would be the best locations. So what do you think about just the impact of this uncertainty around that funding?

MOAZ UDDIN Yeah, that's certainly going to be chilling for the EV market. There's a lot of progress that's happening in Minnesota. And we have a goal of having 20% of all passenger cars on our roads being electric by 2030. And at GPI, we've done some back of the envelope calculations and how many chargers we're going to need if we're going to get to that 20% goal, and that's 2,400 DC fast chargers on public roads in Minnesota.

NINA MOINI: Wow.

MOAZ UDDIN Right now, we're at about a third of that. And NEVI serves as a catalyst for really building confidence in the EV charging industry. So it wasn't just the investment that MnDOT spoke about, but also the confidence it builds and attracting the private sector to also invest in this industry. So while this certainly wouldn't stop EV adoption or chargers getting in the ground in Minnesota, it certainly slows that effort.

NINA MOINI: Transportation, as I'm sure you know, is Minnesota's largest source of greenhouse gas emissions, a key factor in climate change. But there are other strategies, like uplifting public transportation. How important, from all of the different strategies that the state could use to help with greenhouse gas emissions, how important is this EV goal, from your perspective?

MOAZ UDDIN Certainly, Nina. I think we, even at GPI, even looking at transportation, it's all of the above. We need to reduce vehicle miles traveled. We need to look into alternatives to single vehicles traveling on our roads.

But given that the majority of emissions currently are coming from passenger vehicles, and we have a viable technology that can be adopted to reduce those emissions, we conducted an analysis recently looking at the life cycle emissions for EVs, so this is cradle to grave. We're including the production of these vehicles, where the batteries come from, eventually recycling, and we found out that by replacing a conventional vehicle with an electric vehicle, you can reduce your emissions by 50% with today's grid. And Minnesota has goals to really clean up that grid up to 100% clean, renewable energy by 2040. In that situation, we can reduce our emissions by 90% by swapping conventional vehicles with an electric vehicle.

NINA MOINI: Wow. Yeah, those are staggering numbers and so interesting. One of our reporters, Melissa Olson, did a story this week, actually, about a nonprofit that was installing a charger in Minneapolis. So I'm curious to what you think about the role of nonprofits, private companies in building this infrastructure. Is federal funding, state funding necessary for these goals to move forward? Or do you think, to the point of those who want to cut spending in these areas, other stakeholders could step up?

MOAZ UDDIN That's a great question, Nina. And we do organize coalitions, including nonprofits like us. Utilities have a big role to play here, retailers and, of course, existing gas station owners and other potential site hosts here. So it's going to take everyone to really complete this transition to transportation electrification.

Now, with something like NEVI or even a state push, what happens is, as I mentioned earlier, it's usually a catalyst that's going to attract further investment. And it helps with the timeline. We have our goals for a certain number of EVs on the road to meet our climate goals by 2030. The sooner we put these chargers in, the sooner we achieve those goals. So yes, this transition will happen with or without the government. But having programs like NEVI really means we can achieve these goals on time.

NINA MOINI: And can you just say again what NEVI stands for?

MOAZ UDDIN Yes. It's the National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure program.

NINA MOINI: Got it.

MOAZ UDDIN Yes.

NINA MOINI: OK, so just, like, the overarching goal. And I don't want to let you go, Moaz, before we also get a chance to talk about another area that has been impacted by some federal policy or could be impacted, talking about the big tax and spending bill that the Senate passed yesterday. If the House passes this version of the bill, it would end tax credits for electric vehicles purchased after September of this year. Can you talk a little bit about what you think the impact to consumers and the trend might be if that happens? And what is that rebate here?

MOAZ UDDIN That is correct, Nina. And we're also following that. So it passed the Senate, and that's going to affect the tax credit for EVs. There are about three tax credits. So one is \$7,500 for new EVs for qualified vehicles and buyers. And then there's the used EV credit. That was \$4,000, again, for qualified EVs and buyers. And there was also a commercial EV tax credit of \$7,500.

So all of these were originally going to go until 2032. And if the bill passes as it is, these tax credits would end by the end of September this year. And that, again, would have the effect of slowing the transition to EVs. There are a lot of people who are on the fence. If they are presented with \$7,500 off their next vehicle, they might switch towards an EV. But by no means would it end the transition to EVs. We were at 10% of all passenger vehicle sales being EV last year. So what we're hoping is that trend is going to continue. We'll have more and more sales being EVs, but it can certainly be slowed down by taking away these tax credits.

NINA MOINI: Moaz, thank you so much for coming by. We hope you'll come visit us again as some of these policy decisions start to unfold, because it's fascinating, this evolution that's happening to EVs. Thank you.

MOAZ UDDIN Absolutely. Thank you for having me, Nina.

MIAN:

NINA MOINI: Moaz Uddin Mian, Senior EV Policy Specialist with the Great Plains Institute. And we reached out to MnDOT for a statement. They said they are working with the Minnesota Attorney General's office and federal partners to determine next steps.